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Conference Abstract

Managing Data in the NIWA Invertebrate Collection: Past and Present Methodology

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Abstract

The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) Invertebrate Collection is a Nationally Significant Collection consisting of around 300,000 marine invertebrate specimen jars housed at the NIWA Greta Point campus in Wellington, New Zealand. Our collection holdings include samples from New Zealand, Antarctic and Pacific waters and represent over 70 years of collecting and is still growing. We estimate approximately 40% of our collections are registered and digitally accessible (about 127,000 records since digital registering began in 2004), with most of our unregistered material being historical collections.

We are the repository for several important historical collections, one of the largest being the former New Zealand Oceanographic Institute (NZOI) collection, a taxonomically diverse and a geographically wide-ranging collection which occurred from the 1950's to the early 1990's. Associated specimen information such as station data and taxonomic identification for these historical collections are managed by NIWA staff and are in the form of Microsoft Excel and Access spreadsheets, NIWA and NZOI Biodiversity Memoirs, and online via the NIWA cruise and station database. These data are manually collated and registered into our Specify collections software specimen database which offers a unified and comprehensive data repository for our historical specimens, therefore greatly improving data accessibility.

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To expedite the availability of data and improve access to specimens for our users we are focusing on the registration of both important historical and taxonomic collections, and streamlining the registration of specimens in the field onboard NIWA's research vessel Tangaroa. Our field registration and curation techniques have been fine-tuned over the years and now we are capturing data directly into a shipboard copy of Specify in the sorting lab on the ship, printing labels with a thermal printer, and importing data back to our home version following the end of the voyage using Specify's Workbench feature. This process reduces the time spent double-handling specimens and entering data off paper record sheets and allows the capture of data directly into our database immediately after collection and sorting onboard the ship.

Keywords

Natural History Collection, Digitisation, Data, Taxonomic Collection, Marine Invertebrate, NIWA, NIWA Invertebrate Collection, Specify

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